

secure freedom from the various degrees and forms of servitude that still oppressed them severally. Whenever there is a labour movement, a few will always be communists, and the conservative classes will always give unfair prominence to the extreme idea.

The itinerant friars, with their direct and powerful influence on both poor and rich, were thought to have an active share in the fermentation that led to the risings. They were loudly accused by the Lollards of setting class against class.¹ Probably the friar on his rounds was urged by self-interest to keep up his popularity, and often by genuine feelings to protest against oppression and serfdom. He had imbibed in his convent a theoretical prejudice against property, Langland declares that the friars preached communism to the vulgar, with arguments drawn from the proverbial learning of their order.

They preach men of Plato and prove it by Seneca,
That all things under Heaven ought to be in
common;
And yet he lieth, as I live, that to the unlearned so
preacheth.²

Besides the friars, there was another body of friends of the people who at the time of the Rising were just coming into prominence. Wycliffe's Poor Priests cannot at this time have been, and probably never were, at work all over England. Neither had this missionary movement yet been organised as regularly as it afterwards was. But it seems clear that men, drawing some of their doctrines from the great Oxford reformer, were already perambulating the country. It would, indeed, be remarkable if at a period of such fierce social agitation, and such desperate religious controversy, the theories of the most famous thinker of the time had not been carried far and wide in the mouths of enthusiasts, and more or less travestied in the process. What these theories were on religion, and on Church property, we have already seen. But it is the doctrine of Wycliffe with regard to secular property, that specially concerns the story of the Peasants' Rising. Ten years before that event he had expounded his famous theory of 'dominion/ All things, he said, belonged to God, and all men held of him

¹ *Fasc. Z.i 292-4.*

² *Piers Plowman, B» xx. 273-5.*